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John F. Goucher

Native converts

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THE CONVERTED OPIUM-SMOKER.

BY REV. S. L. BALDWIN, D.D.

In 1863, as the Rev. S. L. Binkley was preaching one day in the Mission Chapel at Ato, in the southern suburbs of the great city of Foochow, China, a man about forty years of age, seeing the chapel doors open, strayed in out of curiosity, and took a seat with the congregation. He listened with great attention to the preaching; and, at the close of the service, when all the rest of the audience had gone out, he made his way up to the altar, and said to the missionary, "Did you say that Jesus (I never heard of him before; I don't know who he is); but did you say that he can save me from all my sins?" "Yes;" replied Mr. B., "that is just what I said." "But," the Chinaman responded, "you didn't know me when you said that; you didn't know that I have been a gambler and a sorcerer for

many years; you didn't know that I have been a licentious man; you didn't know that I have been an opium-smoker for twenty years, and every one knows that any man who has smoked opium for that length of time can never be cured of the habit. If you had known all this, you wouldn't have said that Jesus can save me from all my sins—would you?" "Yes;" replied the missionary, "I would have said just what I did; and I tell you now that Jesus can save you from all your sins."

The poor, sinful Chinaman was bewildered. It seemed to him impossible of belief. Yet there was a charm about the very idea of a Saviour, who could deliver him from all his sins. He went away in deep thought. The next day he sought Mr. Binkley at his residence, to talk with him about this wonderful Saviour; and day after day for many days he came, examining the proofs of Christianity, and bringing his objections to be solved by the missionary. But one day he came to the missionary's study with a radiant countenance, exclaiming as he entered. "I know it! I

know it! I know that Jesus can save me from my sins; for He has done it!"

He had a great battle to overcome his habit of opium smoking, but seeking help from his new-found Saviour, he soon conquered, and said, "I don't want to smoke opium any more; I don't want to do any of the evil things I have been doing; but I want to go and tell the people of Hok-chiang that Jesus can save them from their sins." When his friends heard of his purpose, they tried to dissuade him, saying, "Don't go down there; the people are fighting there all the time; they will soon take your head off, and that will stop your preaching. If you will preach the 'foreign doctrine,' stay here at Foochow and preach it where you will be safe." But he replied, "No; I must go to Hok-chiang. The people there need the gospel, and they are my people. I came from there, and I must go and tell them about Jesus."

There was no time for a college course, or for theological training. He went out with the Word of God in his hand, and the experience of his Saviour's love in his

heart. His simple message to the people everywhere was, "Jesus can save you from all your sins; I know it, for he has saved me from mine!" He suffered much persecution—stoned in one place, pelted with mud in another, beaten in another, he pressed on with indomitable energy, proclaiming everywhere his simple message of salvation. Many listened to his earnest words, and became followers of Christ.

After a time he was caught by his enemies in the city of Hok-chiang, and brought before the district magistrate, with false charges against him, and false witnesses to testify to them; and the too-willing heathen magistrate sentenced him to be beaten with two thousand stripes. This cruel sentence was executed with the bamboo upon the bare back of the victim.

I well remember the day when he was brought to our Mission premises, apparently almost dead. I well remember the sorrowful countenance of our good Scotch physician, as he came out of the room, after examining his patient, and said, "I

don't think we can save him. I never saw such terrible injuries from beating. The flesh on his back is like quivering jelly. But we will do our best to save him." I remember how I thought over some of the comforting words of Jesus, as I made my way toward the room, that I might try to comfort my brother in his great distress; and I remember, too, the smile with which he greeted me, and how he, speaking first, before I had a chance to say anything, said: "Teacher, this poor body is in great pain just now; but my inside heart has great peace. Jesus is with me; and I think perhaps he will take me to heaven, and I will be glad to go." And then I could see the old fire flashing again in his eyes, as with effort he raised himself a little from his bed, and said, "But if I get up from this, you'll let me go back to Hok-chiang, won't you?"

He was in a precarious condition for some time, but soon began to mend; and before the missionaries thought he ought to leave the premises, he was off again to Hok-chiang, preaching to the very men

who had persecuted him, and with such effect that some of them were converted, and became members of our church in that city.

He continued to preach with much energy and success for a period of fourteen years. He was ordained by Bishop Kingsley, in 1869. Soon after he was appointed to Teng-tiong in 1876, finding himself very ill, he went to his native island of Lam-yit, hoping to improve in the sea breezes, and under the care of physicians there. But when, after some weeks, they told him that his case was hopeless, and that he could not live many weeks, he said: "Then I must go back to my station. I only came here in hope of getting well, so as to do longer service; but if I cannot, then I want to go where my work is, and die at my post." So, in his feebleness, he made his way back to Teng-tiong; and when he could no longer stand to preach, he sat down, gathered the Christians close around him, and talked to them of the love of Jesus, and his power to save from sin.

On Saturday evening, May 19, 1877, he sang two verses of the "Saturday Evening Hymn," beginning,

"To night all worldly things we clear away;
To-morrow, keep holy the Sabbath day."

Finding himself unable in his weakness to sing more, he slowly repeated the last lines:

"Resting on Jesus, my heart has no fear;
I shall reach heaven, my evidence is clear."

Casting a look of tender affection upon his family and the Christian brethren who were present, he gave them his parting blessing, and in a few moments, peacefully breathed his life away, leaving hundreds of converts to Christ, and among them a score of native preachers, brought into the church through his labors.

Mr. Binkley was obliged to return to the United States, by the illness of his wife, before he had been two years in China. I remember how the tears flowed down his face, as I stood with him on the deck of the steamer which was to bear him away, and he said, "I can't bear to go home, when I haven't yet been able to do any-

thing for Jesus here." But in leading this one man to Christ, our dear brother was honored of God in doing a work which will go on in increasing power while the world lasts.

Our last reports show over seven hundred members, over five hundred probationers, and over fifteen hundred adherents in the Hok-chiang district. Does it not pay to preach the Gospel to the Chinese?

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